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WASHINGTON TALK

Briefing

Maneuvers

In the old days, political maneuvering for Presidential nominations began surfacing late in the year before the election. Any public display of interest or activity earlier than that was regarded as premature or even in bad taste, to the extent that any such standard was observed in politics.

But today, a party leader with personal ambition or with a candidate to promote or oppose can't begin too early. Here it is, only nine months after the last Presidential election, and a New Hampshire Republican is already starting a national campaign to keep top Republican leaders uncommitted for the party's 1988 nomination. He is Max Hugel, who worked



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in the 1980 Reagan campaign and briefly served later as deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and he is to hold a news conference this morning at the National Press Club.

The move is sure to be interpreted in professional circles as a holding operation to keep party leaders in key primary and caucus states from endorsing Vice President Bush, although Mr. Hugel is expected to deny any such motivation.

Organizers of the effort say their intent is not to promote any candidate, but there is some contrary evidence. The Hugel news conference was set up by David Carmen, a Washington publicist who until five months ago worked for Lewis E. Lehrman, the wealthy political activist from New York. One of Mr. Carmen's current clients is Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, the former United Nations delegate.